

# THE SUN

## **IT'S OFFICIAL: NORTH END GETS NATIONAL RECOGNITION**

*By Gloria Russell - The Sun Staff*

WESTERLY - Residents have long known that the North End, settled principally by Italian immigrants, has historic value to the community.

Now it's official. The National Park Service has placed it on the National Register of Historic Places.

Preservationists who petitioned on the behalf of the district received the news Wednesday, according to park service spokeswoman Sarah Zurrier. She said the appointment was confirmed by the park service last month.

The North End District joins Main Street, Westerly Downtown, Wilcox Park, Bradford Village and Watch Hill enrollees in federal recognition based on the enclave's historic architecture, its community planning, ethnic heritage and industry.

The acceptance by the federal government is music to the ears of those living or who have lived in the 150-acre district for close to two centuries.

Frederic C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced the inclusion of the North End in the official federal list of properties throughout the U.S. whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation.

Westerly Town Planner William Hasse won the Paul Davidoff Award for Social Commitment to Advocacy Planning from the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association for Westerly's North End Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.

Although Westerly was first settled in the mid-17th century, no major development of the north end of town occurred until around two centuries later. Many residents were skilled stoneworkers and created the walls that mark property lines on several streets. The development of the district between the 1830's and 1950's was built on the local textile and granite industries supported primarily by the Italian immigrant population. Which community supporters have said provided a strong cultural identity. Enduring Italian institutions include the North End Social Club, the Calabrese Club, and Liguori's Market on Pierce Street - in business for 80 years.

According to Kathryn J. Cavanaugh, a Providence consultant in Historic Preservation and Urban Planning, the district has some 243 buildings including 50-non-residential structures like a church, mill, school, two social clubs and 43 commercial or mixed-use buildings.

The district is bounded on the east by High Street; on the south by certain properties on Friendship Street, West Street, Pleasant Street, Marriott Avenue and Industrial Drive; on the west by certain properties on Canal Street, Pleasant Street, Pierce Street, and Pond Street; and on the north by certain properties on Pond Street, Turano Avenue, Pierce Street, Pearl Street and High Street.

In the 1990's, the neighborhood was struggling with the stigma of crime, poverty and drug activity. It was in 2001, that the town began working in earnest with the North End Crime Watch/Community Development Inc., to improve the North End's physical and social environment. A 2003 revitalization plan included a number of strategies relative to housing, economic development, streetscapes, public amenities, and enhancing neighborhood identity and civic pride, as well as historic preservation. Now that the district is listed on the National Register, historic tax credits and other incentives will be available to help with the rehabilitation and revitalization of the neighborhoods.

Owners of private property listed on the National Register of Historic Places are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose.

"The significance of the North End Historic District is a reflection of the work and lives of Italo-Americans and other residents who contributed their energy to Westerly's development as a town," said Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC.

"Rehabilitation of historic houses and other buildings in the North End honors this heritage while meeting today's needs," he said.

Ninety-year-old Catherine Algier Vacca grew up on 12 Pearl Street, in the two-family house her laborer father built in the early 1900's, a house still occupied today.

"I'm glad to hear that because it was a very, very nice district," she said after learning of the federal designation. "People were friendly and took great pride in maintaining their homes."

Joseph Vacca, who lived in the family home on Pond Street, was also happy with the news.

"I think we should be proud of the (Italian) nationality," he said. "The old timers did a great job. In those days family helped the family and everybody got along. Everybody made wine. Everybody tried to see who made the best wine and stuff like that. It was a friendly neighborhood, really."